



STUDES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

“GREAT IN THE LOVE OF GOD”: THE
PREACHING OF DIEGO LAÍNEZ

THOMAS J. FLOWERS, SJ

56/3 AUTUMN 2024

THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

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The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is composed of Jesuits appointed from their provinces. The seminar identifies and studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially US and Canadian Jesuits, and gathers current scholarly studies pertaining to the history and ministries of Jesuits throughout the world. It then disseminates the results through this journal.

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THOMAS J. FLOWERS, SJ

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in the beginning. . .

The first word from this editor must certainly be “thank-you” to Fr. Barton T. Geger (ucs) who, with dedication, and for many years, led the production of this journal as its general editor. His deep knowledge of our history, his ability to identify pertinent topics that touch our lives, and his gentle accompaniment of authors, all served us well. Bart, we salute you!

As the newly appointed general editor of *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, I begin my term with a mandate that, succinctly put, entails four responsibilities. First, to sustain the long-standing intellectual quality of each edition. Second, to ensure that each essay relates to the current socio-spiritual context of the Society of Jesus. Third, to recognise, and indeed to enhance, the role that *STUDIES* has played in our ongoing formation. And finally, in the coming year, to digitalise the journal, all under the operational oversight of the Institute of Advanced Jesuit Studies at Boston College.

In this spirit, Fr. Thomas Flowers (uwe) reveals and appropriates, in the current essay, the often-overlooked preaching talent of our second superior general, Diego Laínez (1512–1565). By identifying the necessary religious disposition, sensitivity, and technique that Laínez considers essential to the craft, Fr. Flowers invites us to examine our own homiletics, providing early modern counsel to enrich the efforts of the post-modern Jesuit preacher.

To facilitate this actualisation of our tradition, we are including, beginning with the current issue, as regular features of the publication a prayer written specifically to accompany the article and a series of reflection questions, all of which will appear on the page preceding the article. While we intend the prayer to frame your reading of the article, we hope that the questions might facilitate private and/or group reflection to integrate the content into the intellectual, affective, and pastoral aspects of our lives.

Finally, I would add that the richness of *STUDIES* correlates directly to the outstanding quality of its authorship. Looking back over

previous issues, I have found important articles written by acknowledged experts in their respective fields and by Jesuits at various stages of formation, including former provincials, brothers, men in first studies, and a novice. With this in mind, I invite all Jesuits to consider how they might author an article that contributes to this important enterprise of spiritual and intellectual renewal. To this end, I propose the following consideration: journeying as brothers across a common spiritual landscape, might each of us have discovered a unique perspective, informed by prayer, intellectual pursuits, and/or pastoral experience, that we might share? Should your reflection raise an idea for an article to offer to our editorial board, please let me know.

Michael L. Knox, SJ
General Editor

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*Lord Jesus, in your great love,
you once called Peter and Andrew
to leave their nets behind and fish for souls.
Your love gives meaning to our lives
and your call echoes in our minds.
Enflame us with that same love and that same zeal
as we proclaim to your people the Good News
of your life, death, and resurrection.
Help us to know you, to love you,
and to share the riches of your life in all we do.
Accompany us as we preach your word.
May we teach with simplicity and conviction.
May we move hearts as you have moved us to serve you.
And may we fill spirits with the delight of knowing
their Creator and Lord ever more deeply.*

1. Given both what others said about Laínez as a preacher and what Laínez said about preaching, what do you consider the essential elements that made him an effective preacher in his specific context? Do those elements still apply to the context that faces us as preachers today?
2. What about the Good News of Jesus Christ resonates most deeply in your own prayer? What do you most want to share with the people of God about the Lord whom you have come to know through prayer, study, and ministry?
3. What practical steps might we take as preachers to grow in our ability to teach, persuade, and delight our congregations? Which of these aspects of good preaching do we find most lacking in the sermons we hear? Which of these aspects do we find most lacking in our own homilies?

“Great in the Love of God”: The Preaching of Diego Laínez

Thomas J. Flowers, SJ

Good preaching mattered to Diego Laínez (1512–1565). As he saw it, Jesus himself had summed up “the office of preacher . . . when he called the apostles Saint Peter and Saint Andrew to him, saying: come here and I will make you fishers of men; in this he declared that the office of preacher is the office of gaining souls.”¹ This was no high-minded declaration but a reflection of the motivation that led Laínez to dedicate countless hours to preparing and giving sermons, no matter what more seemingly important affairs demanded his attention. As such, his wisdom, and his example as a preacher, still speak eloquently to Jesuits and all preachers today who seek, in the words of Pope Francis, to “remain faithful to the Word that rouses the heart.”²

Too often, however, as the pope noted in his Angelus message on January 23, 2022, homilies today “are abstract, and instead of awakening the soul, they put it to sleep.”³ The problem begins, Pope Francis explains, when a homily “deteriorates to moralism or abstract concepts; it presents the Gospel with detachment, as if it were outside time, far from reality.”⁴ Good preaching is rooted in reality, capable of touching the hearts of listeners with the consolation of the Gospel. Despite the remove of centuries, Laínez provides us with counsel for preaching

¹ Diego Laínez, “Avisos para los que comienzan á predicar,” in Andrés Martínez de Azagra y Beladiez, *El P. Diego Laynez, Segundo Preósito General de la Compañía de Jesús* (Madrid, 1933), 385; hereafter cited as “Avisos.”

² Francis, Angelus (Rome, January 23, 2022), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2022/documents/20220123-angelus.html>.

³ Francis, Angelus.

⁴ Francis, Angelus.

that responds to Pope Francis's call. He presents us with a model for sermons that address the reality of both the world and the Gospel—sermons that speak so as to awaken the spirits of listeners. In short, Laínez offers a thoroughly Christ-centered approach to preaching that can still serve as a guide for those of us today who wish not to put our congregations to sleep but to stir their hearts to love.

This vision of what preaching ought to be was part of Laínez's identity as a Jesuit and remains part of what it means to be a Jesuit today.

This vision of what preaching ought to be was part of Laínez's identity as a Jesuit and remains part of what it means to be a Jesuit today. To understand this, it is helpful to reflect upon

the instructions that Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) addressed to the Jesuits sent as theologians to the fraught first period of the Council of Trent (1545–1547).⁵ Although all the Jesuits sent to Trent went to serve as theologians, Ignatius devoted only the first third of his written instructions to his expectations for how the Jesuits would comport themselves in the debates of the council, while the remainder dwelt on how the Jesuits ought to minister and live during their sojourn in Trent. In these instructions, Ignatius expressed the conviction that “for the greater glory of God our Lord, our main purpose during this stay at Trent is . . . to preach, hear confessions, and give lectures, while teaching children, giving good example, visiting the poor in hospitals, and exhorting our neighbors,” and by these means to move “all the persons we can to devotion and prayer.”⁶ These customary ministries of the Society by which Jesuits sought, in the words of the 1540 *Formula of the Institute*, “the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine,” occupied no less prominent a place in the mind of Ignatius than the weighty ecclesiastical affairs treated at the council.⁷

⁵ Letter 123, MHSI, *Monumenta Ignatiana. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Societatis Jesu fundatoris epistolae et instructiones (Epp. et instruct.)*, 12 vols. (Madrid: 1903–1911), 386–89; in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, trans. Martin E. Palmer, SJ, John W. Padberg, SJ, and John L. McCarthy, SJ (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 2006), 128–31.

⁶ Letter 169, *Epp. et instruct.* I:386–89; trans. Palmer, Padberg, and McCarthy, 129.

⁷ “Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae,” in Philip R. Amidon, SJ, trans., “Papal Documents from the Early Years of the Society of Jesus in English Translation,” *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 1–7 at 3. For more about the Society's

In other words, teaching children, ministering to the sick, caring for the poor, hearing confessions, and preaching mattered in every context and circumstance, and Ignatius saw these humble ministries as characteristic marks of the Jesuit mission.

Regarding preaching, Ignatius counselled avoidance of controversial topics in favor of exhorting “your audience to virtue and to devotions approved by the Church.”⁸ The Jesuits at Trent were to aim in their preaching not to explain theology, but to awaken “souls to thorough self-knowledge and love of their Creator and Lord.”⁹ In this sense, at the heart of the preaching that Ignatius expected of Jesuits lay the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises: growing in knowledge of oneself—including one’s sinfulness—and deepening one’s love of God in ever-closer discipleship. Indeed, Ignatius’s words about preaching recall his definition of spiritual consolation as “that which occurs when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord.”¹⁰ From this perspective, a Jesuit sermon should seek not to instruct but to console.

Diego Laínez was one of the Jesuit theologians at Trent who received these instructions. Furthermore, the witness of his ministry, at Trent and throughout his life, reveals that he shared Ignatius’s convictions about preaching. Laínez’s theological acumen and penetrating insight fast earned him a position of prominence at the Council of Trent.¹¹ Yet amid his theological work, he never flagged in his efforts to follow Ignatius’s instructions regarding his use of time at the council. In particular, he never ceased to preach. His younger Jesuit confrere, Peter Canisius (1521–1597), who was also present at the first session of the council, spoke in glowing terms of the esteem in which both Laínez and

“customary ministries,” see John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5–6, 84–90.

⁸ Letter 169, *Epp. et instruct.* I:386–389; trans. Palmer, Padberg, and McCarthy, 130.

⁹ Letter 169, *Epp. et instruct.* I:386–389; trans. Palmer, Padberg, and McCarthy, 130.

¹⁰ *Spiritual Exercises* 316, hereafter abbreviated *SpEx*; *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. and ed., George E. Ganss, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 1992), 94–95. All quotations from the *SpEx* are from this edition.

¹¹ See below for a further explanation of Laínez’s role at the council.

his fellow Jesuit theologian, Alfonso Salmerón (1515–1585), were held at Trent. Canisius noted that among the “many very learned theologians” at the council, “there are none more universally beloved and admired than these two, Laínez and Salmerón.”¹² Indeed, “when the space of a single hour remained for a few [theologians] to speak, I think that the presiding cardinal himself gave three hours and more for Father Laínez to speak.”¹³ Yet despite the pressure of these high expectations and the intensity of the preparation that such interventions required, “Laínez kept on with the task of preaching.”¹⁴ According to the secretary of Society, Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517–1576), who chronicled the activities of the early Jesuits during the generalate of Ignatius, the council authorities had denied permission to the theologians of other religious orders except the Jesuits to preach publicly in the churches of Trent. With this permission, then, “Father Laínez performed this office every Sunday and feast day with edification and indeed before a large audience of eminent men at the Church of Blessed Mary.”¹⁵ Certainly, Fr. Laínez never ceased to privilege good preaching.

This article will explore Laínez’s testament to good preaching in two parts. First, I will present Laínez the preacher, situating his preaching in the context of his era, his vocation, and his other ministries. How Laínez served as a preacher, and how he privileged this ministry amid the many other claims upon his time, stand as a witness worth learning from and emulating. Further, the specific sort of praise he received for his preaching, as well as the content of his sermons, give an initial indication of what made his preaching stand out. Second, I will present and synthesize the counsel that Laínez offered to preachers in an undated treatise entitled, “Advice for Those Who Begin to Preach.”¹⁶ He had composed this text with the intention of helping preachers deliver a very different—and much longer—type of sermon than the five to ten

¹² Juan Alfonso de Polanco, *Year by Year with the Early Jesuits: Selections from the Chronicon of Jian de Polanco, SJ*, trans. and ed. John Patrick Donnelly, SJ (St. Louis: IJS, 2004), 59; hereafter *Year by Year*.

¹³ Polanco, *Year by Year*, 59.

¹⁴ Polanco, *Year by Year*, 59.

¹⁵ Polanco, *Year by Year*, 48.

¹⁶ Laínez, “Avisos,” in *El P. Diego Laynez*, 385–450.

minute homilies we are used to delivering during liturgies.¹⁷ Nevertheless, when read in its proper context, Laínez's perspective on preaching provides an eminently practical and contemporarily relevant guide. As such, I conclude the article with an application of Laínez's fundamental counsels to the realities of our present-day preaching. And, because many of these elements align with Pope Francis's own instructions on preaching, I will explore these commonalities in order to develop criteria for effective preaching today.

In all of this, I argue that Diego Laínez still has something to say both to those who are just beginning to preach and to those who are long practiced in the art. In his words about preaching, he still can awaken "souls to thorough self-knowledge and love of their Creator and Lord" so that we might, in turn, communicate God's love to those whom we serve.¹⁸

I. Laínez the Preacher

Diego Laínez's intervention, during the first period of the Council of Trent, on the neuralgic topic of how humans are justified by God, earned him fame and respect for both his theology and his preaching. But he did not arrive at Trent with universal renown as a theologian or preacher. His presence was due to the decision of Pope Paul III to utilize Jesuits as his own theologians at the council. The original slate of Jesuits nominated to serve as papal theologians at the council consisted of Pierre Favre (1506–1546), Alfonso Salmerón, and Laínez, but Favre died in Rome before he could set out for Trent. Whether Ignatius made the choice of these three men in complete autonomy, or in conversation with the pope, or the papal curia, is not entirely clear; however, all three Jesuits were known to the pope for their eloquence and erudition.¹⁹ Still, Laínez had to build his reputation at

¹⁷ For more on this, see part II

¹⁸ Letter 169, *Epp. et instruct.* I:386–389; trans. Palmer, Padberg, and McCarthy, 130.

¹⁹ Ignatius refers to choosing the three Jesuits himself in a letter to Francisco Borja dated April 23, 1546, in *Epp. et instruct.* I:379–82. Polanco, on the other hand, seems to indicate that the pope had a hand in the choice of these men (Polanco, *Year By Year*, 34). For a discussion of these sources and an account of Laínez's presence at Trent, see

the council by his own merits: on the strength of the work he did as theologian, the speeches he gave during the sessions, and the sermons he preached on Sundays and feasts days.

Certainly, Laínez already possessed a considerable education and experience as a theologian and a speaker by the time he arrived in Trent. He had earned his master of arts degree in 1532 at the University of Alcalá, where he studied alongside his friend Alfonso Salmerón and had some acquaintance with Ignatius.²⁰ From there, both he and Salmerón went to the University of Paris to study theology. According to Polanco, Laínez's motive for the move to Paris was as much rooted in his desire to follow Ignatius as to continue his education.²¹ By August 1534, he had made the Spiritual Exercises under Ignatius's direction and was firmly part of the group that would come to be known as the First Companions. Once he had finished his theological studies in 1536, he traveled with the group to Venice where he was ordained a priest in 1537. Thereafter, Laínez began a rather peripatetic stretch of years teaching, preaching, hearing confessions, and giving the Spiritual Exercises. Between 1539 and 1546, he worked at all these ministries in, among other Italian cities, Rome, Parma, Venice, Piacenza, Padua, Brescia, Bassano, Bologna, and Damaso.

Laínez was beloved by the people he served, and much sought after as a preacher. Jerónimo Doménech (1516–1592), who entered the Society in 1539 under the tutelage of Favre and Laínez, recounts how throngs gathered to hear Laínez preach in Parma in 1541, “not only on Sundays and feast days, but all other days.”²² On this note, such was the affection of his congregants that when he was about to leave for Piacenza, “because

Joseph H. Fichter, SJ, *James Laynez: Jesuit* (St. Louis/London: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), 56–68, esp. 56–57.

²⁰ For a timeline of the events of Laínez's life, see Javier Cia Blasco, SJ, “Itinerario biográfico,” in *Diego Laínez (1512–1565) and his Generalate: Jesuit with Jewish Roots, Close Confidant of Ignatius of Loyola, Preeminent Theologian of the Council of Trent*, ed. Paul Oberholzer (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2015), 37–44. For a biography of Laínez in English, see Fichter, *James Laynez: Jesuit*.

²¹ Juan Alfonso de Polanco, *Vita Ignatii Loiolae et rerum Societatis Iesu historica (Chronicon)*, 6 vols. (Madrid, 1894–1898), VII.

²² Doménech to Ignatius, 15 January 1541, *Epistolae mixtae ex variis Europae loci ab anno 1537 ad 1556 scriptae (Epist. mixtae)*, 5 vol. (Madrid, 1898–1901), I: 54.

of the importuning of many devotees, he determined that he would come to preach to them at least one more time.”²³

Given his frequent travels, and the press of these pastoral responsibilities, it is not surprising that Laínez had little time to study any theology that was not directly related to the preparation of sermons or lectures or to write much beyond letters. In these years, and indeed for most of his life, he placed his theological education at the service of the faithful, rather than only at the service of clerics at universities. For example, when in 1558 he became the second superior general of the Society, it was the service of his fellow Jesuits that occupied nearly all his time. But for all that, there is no doubt regarding the sharpness of his intellect or that he could easily turn his eloquence to the neuralgic theological questions of his day—as his activities at the Council of Trent make readily apparent.

[Laínez] placed his theological education at the service of the faithful, rather than only at the service of clerics at universities.

A. A Skillful Eloquence

No aspect of his long and painstaking participation at all three periods of Trent (1545–1547; 1551–1552; 1562–1563) reveals more pointedly the lasting significance of his contributions to the work of the council than his involvement, at the first period, in the development of the decree on justification. From nearly the beginning of his great protest, the reformer Martin Luther placed at the center of the debate how God justifies human beings. For Luther, human salvation resulted from God’s unmerited justification of sinners. Specifically, Luther insisted that the human will had no determinative role in how a person was saved. Instead, justification required only the faith of the person to the exclusion of one’s outward works. Luther thus rejected all theological positions that asserted that humans could in any way merit some part of their salvation by their acts of piety and charity.

²³ Doménech to Ignatius, 15 January 1541, *Epist. mixtae*, I: 53.

Of course, since at least the fifth century, when St. Augustine of Hippo flourished, Catholic theologians, councils of the church, and popes had condemned the position that human beings can merit, or earn, their own salvation. Consequently, Luther's position on grace versus merit provoked quite a spectrum of theological reactions, even within the ranks of those who remained in communion with the Catholic Church. The theological complications of how human will and human merit were related to God's salvific grace divided not only Luther's followers from Catholics but also Catholics among themselves. Thus, when the participants at the Council of Trent faced the charge of developing a definitive statement on justification that responded to Luther's position, the debates at the council quickly grew contentious.

Regarding this problem, it was Laínez, more than any other theologian at the council, who found a solution. The question came to bear on how much the council could cede to the Lutheran position without denying human cooperation in the process of justification. In other words, the debate involved how to preserve both the primacy of God's grace in salvation and the significance of human cooperation with this grace. In his formal intervention on the topic, Laínez skillfully demonstrated, with extensive scriptural and patristic citations, the pitfalls of both the position that only faith was necessary for salvation and the belief that God leaves us alone to work out our salvation.²⁴ His speech, eventually printed in the official acts of the council, made clear the way forward. In the final decree, the council declared both that no one was justified by his own merits without grace and that good works are nevertheless "the good merits of him that is justified."²⁵

²⁴ Fichter, *James Laynez*, 61–66.

²⁵ H. J. Schroeder, O.P., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: Original Text with English Translation* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1960), 42–46, canons 1, 32. Here, note that in 1997 the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church issued the "Joint Declaration on Justification" affirming that "consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics." Ultimately, the theologians engaged in the work of developing this statement concluded, among other things, that "the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent." This statement subtly acknowledges that the condemnations issued by Trent on justification remain valid, but that they do not condemn the position on justification espoused

In retrospect, it seems likely that the success of Laínez in leading the council toward its definitive conclusion on the thorny matter of justification stemmed, at least in part, from the primacy of place that he afforded to preaching. Breaking through the angst and confusion that had raged in theological and ecclesiastical circles for the nearly three decades called for more than a logically sound theological position. To convince the diverse group of clerics and nobles who had to vote on the decrees at the council, it also required eloquence. And indeed, the opening of Laínez's lengthy and erudite discourse seems more like a sermon than an academic treatise.

In his address, Laínez presents as a parable what he regards as the three basic positions on justification. Here, he suggests that his audience can understand the disparate opinions on justification by imagining an "all-powerful and supremely wealthy king, who wishes to offer his treasures to his subjects."²⁶ This king gives his wealth to his "dearest son," who in turn offers to distribute valuable jewels three different ways to three different slaves. To the first slave, the son says, "Only believe in me, and I, who have merited all the riches of the king, will ensure that the proposed jewel is given to you gratuitously." Next, the king's son sees to it that the second slave receives a large amount of money "by which he may be redeemed from, and cured of, slavery," and exhorts him to "buy a horse and arms so that [he] may contend in the struggle." For the third slave, the son "obtains liberation from slavery, his health and arms, by which he may boldly and properly struggle and merit by law the proposed jewel."

by the Lutheran World Federation. In this, the conclusions of the declaration offer a tacit complement to the theological sophistication of the Tridentine decree. As such, the nuances of the original text left sufficient room for further theological development, and Laínez made a key contribution to this nuanced position.

For the references, see Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (1997), §40–41, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1999-dichiarazione-congiunta-sulla-dottrina-della-justificazion/en.html>.

²⁶ Laínez, "Disputatio de justitia imputata," in *Disputationes Tridentinae*, ed. Hartmann Grisar, SJ (Regensburg: Felix Raunch, 1886), 153–92 at 154, hereafter *Disputationes Tridentinae*. For an English-language summary, see Fichter, *James Laynez*, 64–65.

As for the interpretation of the parable, the first offer represents what Laínez took to be the Lutheran position, whereby we are justified without regard for merit, and God only asks us in return to have faith.

Laínez thus simplified the complexities of the theological debate over justification in a way that allowed even the less erudite among his listeners to grasp his meaning.

Then, the second offer, compromise, epitomizes the rearticulated Catholic position previously presented in the council debates—namely, that while we must fight to obtain our salvation, we engage in this struggle entirely by grace, such that we cannot regard our deeds in any way as meritorious.

To put this another way, while we engage in the fight, the “horse and arms” are God’s gift to us. The third offer then represents for Laínez the appropriate Catholic position that God freely saves us and freely gives us the ability and the means to struggle for our salvation but that we ourselves merit our salvation by engaging freely in that struggle.

By his parable, Laínez thus simplified the complexities of the theological debate over justification in a way that allowed even the less erudite among his listeners to grasp his meaning. By using his talent for making himself understood as a preacher, Laínez in this way made his position on justification seem like the only possible solution to the theological difficulties that faced the council. In short, his preaching style made his theology both more palatable and more effective.

B. An Intelligible Simplicity

Laínez had a knack for making himself understood and for captivating congregations. The accolades that cling to his preaching in the annals of the Society demonstrate this and paint a portrait of his appealing style as a preacher. In the accounts left by Juan de Polanco, and in other Jesuit correspondence, the simplicity and emotional resonance of Laínez’s preaching comes to the fore. Rather than relying on rhetorical flourishes or catering to an intellectual elite, Laínez kept his preaching at a level where all could understand, seeking to move hearts with an unadorned manner.

Fellow Jesuit André des Freux (ca. 1515–1556) had the occasion to attend an eight-day cycle of sermons Laínez gave in Florence in June 1547. In a letter to Ignatius, des Freux gushed, “I have never heard nor hope to hear in my life preaching so absolute and perfect in spirit, doctrine, pronunciation, [and] moderated gestures.”²⁷ His enthusiasm is even more notable in consideration of des Freux’s own erudition and rhetorical training. Note that des Freux was the famed Latinist whose most lasting legacy was translating the *Spiritual Exercises* into Latin for the officially approved version of 1548. Of des Freux, Ignatius once commented that “I do not know of a man today more learned, pious, and generous, nor more natural and easy.”²⁸ Ignatius missioned him as one of the founding members of the faculty at the College of Messina in 1548 to serve “as a lecturer, I do not know of what, since he can do it all.”²⁹ As such, des Freux’s praise of Laínez’s preaching indicates the esteem of a fellow practitioner of the art.

Yet buried at the end of des Freux’s list of “absolute and perfect” elements of Laínez’s sermons, the phrase “moderated gestures” may seem to strike a somewhat discordant note, whether in English or in the original Italian: *gesti moderati*. Here, it seems odd to compliment someone for being restrained in his physical movements while preaching, particularly when considered alongside the more clearly positive attributes of having perfect doctrine and pronunciation. Yet, in this oddly specific phrase, des Freux reveals the centrality of simplicity in presentation to Laínez’s style. Lauding Laínez for moderate gestures calls to mind purveyors of the contrary: bombastic preachers who flail their arms while speaking and contort their faces into the caricature of intense emotion to keep the auditor’s attention and make themselves understood. Des Freux considers all that as distraction, and holds up Laínez for eschewing any trace of melodrama in his sermons. In other words, rather than giving into theatrics, Laínez maintained a natural calm that allowed his conviction and message to emerge unobtrusively.

²⁷ Des Freux to Ignatius, July 2, 1547, Letter 11, *Litterae Quadrimestres Ex Universis Praeter Indiam et Brasiliam Locis in Quibus Aliqui de Societate Iesu Versabantur Romam Mis-sae* (*LittQuad*), 7 vols. (Madrid and Rome, 1894–1932), I:45–47 at 45.

²⁸ Ignatius to Doménech, 18 March 1548, Letter 275, *Epp. et instruct.* II:26.

²⁹ Ignatius to Doménech, 18 March 1548, Letter 275, *Epp. et instruct.* II: 26.

Nevertheless, this subtlety did not belie the effectiveness or emotional appeal of Laínez's sermons. Polanco, writing of Laínez's arrival in Florence earlier in the same year that des Freux had heard him preach, notes that "that month, which was January, although the cold was most fierce in Florence, crowds were nevertheless frequent" at Laínez's sermons "and the consolation and edification of the citizenry not minor."³⁰ Indeed, Polanco refers to throngs "who most avidly and with great attention and, seemingly, emotion, [were] hearing the word of God" when they attended his sermons.³¹

Here, part of his appeal may well have been his straightforward style. As des Freux explains, Laínez preached "with such clarity and facility in saying and expressing things" and particularly utilized "familiar examples (where the passages occurred that were too high or subtle to understand commonly) to the end that the simpler women were made to understand."³² Despite his sexism, we can appreciate the insight that Lainez knew how to explain difficult passages of Scripture even to the least educated and used "familiar examples" in order to accomplish this end.

All of this indicates that, while Laínez's sermons seem to have had an emotional appeal and did not lose themselves in sophistry or speculation, neither did they pander and manipulate. But what made his sermons effective had to do above all with their content. One of Laínez's few published sermons demonstrates well his rhetorically straightforward way of offering simple but compelling subject matter.³³ In this sermon, Laínez compares learning to pray to learning to walk, where both require doing the action that one wants to learn: "speaking of prayer there is need to pray together if we want to learn" to pray, "just as it is necessary that we walk often and sometimes fall and get up" again when we are learning how to walk.³⁴ For this reason, Laínez leads his congregation through a series of prayer exercises to teach them to pray.

³⁰ Ignatius to Doménech, 18 March 1548, Letter 275, *Epp. et instruct.* II:26.

³¹ Polanco, *Chronicon*, I:270.

³² Des Freux to Ignatius, July 2, 1547, Letter 11, *LittQuad*, I:45–46.

³³ See Hartmann Grisar, *Disputationes Tridentinae*, 555–60.

³⁴ Laínez, *Disputationes Tridentinae*, 555.

At a later point in that sermon, in discussing the significance of the Lord's Prayer, Laínez emphasizes the need to ponder the words of rote prayers. Here, he cautions against "only making the sound of the words and not thinking at all of what we say."³⁵ To make his point about the need to consider each word of a prayer, he recounts a story about St. Francis of Assisi, who once stopped with a companion in a church for an hour to pray. As they emerged, his companion asked him what prayers he had said, to which Francis replied that "I did not say more than a Hail Mary, and really I did not finish."³⁶ As the story indicates, Laínez aimed at clarity, not dazzling rhetoric, such that his reputation as a preacher relied on his delivering simple messages in a language that people could understand.

II. Laínez on Preaching

The treatise that Laínez composed for "those who begin to preach" focuses on the practical aim of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ with straightforward clarity. For Laínez, Jesus summed up the purpose of preaching when he invited Peter and Andrew to leave their fishing nets behind: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."³⁷ From this perspective, anything else that a sermon might accomplish comes second to this principal evangelical aim of leading people to the living God—of "fishing for souls" to set people "on the road to heaven."³⁸

Laínez takes this as both the starting point and the crux of his treatment of preaching. He aims, with these opening remarks, to strip away the trappings of preaching that too many preachers confuse with the actual substance of the art. On this point, Laínez contends that "they are fooled who think that to preach is to gain the name of being an educated or beautiful preacher or to be followed by many people or to say subtle, well-ordered

³⁵ Laínez, *Disputationes Tridentinae*, 559.

³⁶ Laínez, *Disputationes Tridentinae*, 560.

³⁷ Matthew 4:19. All other biblical citations appearing in this essay come from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).

³⁸ Diego Laínez, "Avisos para los que comienzan á predicar," in Andrés Martínez de Azagra y Beladiez, *El P. Diego Laynez, Segundo Prepósito General de la Compañía de Jesús* (Madrid, 1933), 385–450 at 385. Hereafter cited as, Laínez, "Avisos."

things.”³⁹ As such, the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, not the erudition, eloquence, or fame of the preacher, matters most.

The firmness of Laínez’s conviction in this regard seems even more relevant considering the erudition, eloquence, and—by the time

A good sermon must be rooted in the loving relationship the preacher has with God so that those who hear it may deepen their own relationship with God.

he would have written this treatise—fame of the author. Laínez preached in the context of sixteenth-century Renaissance Europe, when the humanist attempt to revive the classical art of rhetoric had elevated the eloquence of a well-turned phrase to new heights

in the estimation of the educated.⁴⁰ As apparent in Laínez’s specific counsels on technique, he did not disparage good rhetorical training for preachers or eschew the use of all rhetorical devices. His concern, rather, had to do with the fact that both preachers and their audiences grew too easily enamored of the beauty of the style of a sermon regardless of its content. Just so, the person of a preacher and his reputation can become all too important for both the preacher himself and his audience. As such, the sermon should center on the person of Christ and not the preacher. In other words, fame, eloquence, and erudition for their own sake had no place in Laínez’s view of preaching—everything in a good sermon had to lead souls to Christ.

With this principle in mind, we can divide the remainder of Laínez’s counsels on preaching into two parts: first, his further reflections on the foundation of preaching; and second, his explanation of the most apt means to achieve this end. In the logic of Laínez’s treatise, good preaching comes to bear on the intention and interior disposition of the preacher and not on his stylistic expertise, for which reason his

³⁹ Laínez, “Avisos,” 385.

⁴⁰ On the topic of the revival of classical rhetoric in the Renaissance, see Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For the application of classical rhetoric to sermons and how this represented a change from the “scholastic” style of preaching, see John W. O’Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450–1521* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1979).

counsels are not overly technical. He, therefore, does not so much advise the use of a particular style of preaching as present a style of life and ministry that he sees as the necessary context for good preaching. From this perspective, a good sermon must be rooted in the loving relationship the preacher has with God so that those who hear it may deepen their own relationship with God.

A. Foundations Built on Prayer

The foundation of good preaching lies in the familiarity of the preacher with God. Laínez does not mince words in this regard: a preacher must cultivate a deep love for the Lord, “because without Him, he neither will be able to suffer the great labors of the office nor will his words move the hearts of his hearers.”⁴¹ In short, without an abiding love for God at the center of their lives, preachers cannot be effective in their ministry. Thus, it is the love of God that both motivates preachers to preach and makes their preaching stir the spirits of those to whom they preach.

For this reason, preachers must commit themselves first and foremost to prayer. However, Laínez does not present prayer as a tool in the preparation of sermons. He offers no counsel for how long preachers need to pray over the topics of their sermons nor any specific advice regarding the prayer techniques they should utilize. Rather, the importance of prayer appears in his insistence that without regular, sustained contact with God, preachers cannot remain faithful in loving God. Indeed, Laínez contends that it is not enough “that the one who preaches loves God”; to preach well, he must have “a particular friendship with him” and so must spend “much time” in mortification and in prayer.⁴²

And so, the importance of prayer for preachers lies not in its utility for the preparation of a sermon but in the way that prayer forms the spirit of the preacher. Specifically, prayer serves as the foundation of a loving relationship between preachers and the God whom they seek to proclaim in their sermons. He writes, “in order to be a good preacher and to convert people to the service of God, to be great in the love of

⁴¹ Laínez, “Avisos,” 385.

⁴² Laínez, “Avisos,” 388.

God is needful.”⁴³ Grounded in this love, preachers can “proceed with the right intention in sermons.”⁴⁴

This foundational love of God also serves as the basis for the care that preachers lavish upon the people to whom they preach. Laínez here calls to mind St. Peter’s encounter with Jesus after the Resurrection, related at the end of John’s Gospel. Jesus asks him three times, “Peter, do you love me?” to which Peter replies three times in the affirmative.⁴⁵ Jesus’s response to Peter’s declaration of love is to ask him to “feed my lambs.”⁴⁶ Because Peter loves Jesus, he is called to love Jesus’s flock. In the same way, preachers learn to love God’s people by loving God and by learning from Jesus how to care for the people he loves.

Furthermore, preachers express this love of God’s people in the way they love while they preach. As Laínez makes clear, the preacher must possess “the affections that he proposes to evoke in his hearers.”⁴⁷ While he does not elaborate much on this point, his meaning is clear: if the preacher aims to inspire a congregation to fidelity, devotion, and the moral life, he must do much more than merely exhort the observation of the commandments because they conform to evangelical or natural law. Rather, if a preacher wants his congregation to live the Christian life more deeply, he must himself dwell in this same life. Thus, the fundamental work of preachers finds its roots in the “particular friendship” that they themselves have with God. Finally, as people grounded in a loving relationship with God, preachers know that they have received much and been forgiven much by God, such that they are called to share the riches of that tenderness and mercy with their congregation.

Of course, the primary way in which preachers embody the life to which they call those entrusted to them appears in their care for them. This is why Laínez presents Jesus’s call to Peter to “feed my sheep” as fundamental to the ministry of preaching. As such, the mercy that Jesus

⁴³ Laínez, “Avisos,” 386.

⁴⁴ Laínez, “Avisos,” 387.

⁴⁵ Citation?

⁴⁶ Laínez, “Avisos,” 385; Jn 21:15–17.

⁴⁷ Laínez, “Avisos,” 388.

has shown Peter in forgiving him for his betrayal provides the context for Peter's care for the people to whom Jesus sends him as much as does the love that Peter himself has for Jesus. Peter's feeding the sheep of the Lord's flock thus exemplifies a love that can forgive even the worst trespasses. For preachers, the invitation seems clear: not to accuse or scold a congregation but to invite them to share in the riches of God's love that the preachers themselves continually experience.

For preachers, the invitation seems clear: not to accuse or scold a congregation but to invite them to share in the riches of God's love

This all amounts to Laínez's first counsel for preaching well, that the most fundamental "instrument that the preacher must have to preach well" consists in "a great love of God, gained with the exercise of many virtues and prayer."⁴⁸ The quality of the prayer and Christian life of preachers then appears when they preach, from which it follows that, if preachers do not know God well, then they cannot hope to lead their congregations to God. Likewise, if preachers do not love their congregations well, they demonstrate a deficiency in their love of the one who has loved and forgiven them and has asked them to "feed his sheep." And so, long before preachers come to the point of planning or writing a sermon, let alone delivering one, they must attend to their own interior lives, cultivating the familiarity with God that will nourish and motivate their preaching, and stand at the heart of the message that they proclaim.

B. The Good Use of Rhetoric

For Laínez, a loving relationship with God must contextualize any discussion of technique in a sermon, such that everything else that contributes to a sermon falls under the category of means. Likewise, St. Ignatius makes clear in the "Principle and Foundation," at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*, that we should think of everything in life in terms of our ultimate purpose, which is to love and serve God in this life and thereby to live with God forever. As such, everything else in life contributes to this end. For this reason, "we ought to use" created things

⁴⁸ Laínez, "Avisos," 389.

“to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it.”⁴⁹ This principle of directing the use of all things toward the ultimate end of our lives governs Laínez’s approach to the question of technique in a sermon: the value of a particular technique or element of a sermon derives from the way it serves the end of leading people to an encounter with the God who loves them and who calls them to love.

To facilitate this encounter, between a congregation and God, Laínez counsels the preacher to “take care that in each sermon he teaches, persuades, and delights.”⁵⁰ These three elements in turn offer a practical guide for how to prepare and deliver a sermon that manifests the love of God and helps the congregation to love God in return. Indeed, they offer the basic building blocks of effective preaching.

Laínez derives this trio from Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*, where Augustine cites “a man of eloquence” as having asserted that “the eloquent should speak in such a way as to instruct, delight, and move their listeners.”⁵¹ The eloquent man to whom he refers is Cicero, who wrote in *De Oratore* that the orator’s three duties are “to prove, please, and move.”⁵² In citing Cicero, Augustine has replaced prove (*probare*) with teach (*docere*). The change, whether deliberate or accidental, does little to alter the sense of the phrase, since both Augustine and Cicero are referring with their first term (prove/teach), to the didactic, substantive part of a discourse. This differs from the way in which the speaker communicates this substance, which they both link to the other two terms (please and persuade). Indeed, Augustine further cites Cicero in noting that while teaching “is a matter of necessity, delight [is] a matter of charm, and moving them a matter of conquest.”⁵³ This corresponds very closely to what Cicero himself wrote: “the eloquent man . . . will speak, in court and on

⁴⁹ *SpEx* 23; ed. Ganss, 32.

⁵⁰ Laínez, “Avisos,” 102.

⁵¹ Aug. *Doct. Chr.* 4.12.27; Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 229.

⁵² Cicero, *Brutus and Orator*, trans. and ed. Robert A. Kaster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 188; hereafter cited as *Orator*.

⁵³ Aug. *Doct. Chr.* 4.12.27; ed. Green, 229.

politics, so as to prove—as a matter of necessity—to please—through the exercise of charm—and to move—as the source of victory.”⁵⁴

Laínez’s use of these elements makes clear that he had no qualms with the use of rhetoric in sermons, since all three authors faced the same question of what rhetorical means would best serve the speaker’s ends. The difference between the preacher and the rhetorician, as Laínez explains, then lies primarily in the end they seek. Thus, while rhetoricians might practice their art “to give contentment to worldly people” or

Again, sermons do not constitute lessons or lectures but rather helps for the congregation to grow in the love of God in an explicit and immediate way.

to insert themselves in the affairs of “civil lawsuits and criminals,” the preacher “is speaking in the person of God regarding what accomplishes the salvation of souls.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the preacher should be no less diligent than the rhetorician in plying his craft and so must utilize good rhetorical tools in his preaching. At the same time, however, the difference of ends determines much in regard to the choice of rhetorical tools.

Augustine’s change, intentional or not, of language from “proving” to “teaching” serves as a fitting introduction to what Laínez considers essential for a good sermon. Specifically, Laínez did not consider it sufficient that preachers have enough knowledge to prove their points, since they must know sound Catholic doctrine but present only those elements that best will serve their congregations. Given the centrality of teaching to any sermon, it might then seem odd to consider *docere* an element of technique rather than something more fundamental to the nature and aim of a sermon. But Laínez does not regard the specific doctrinal content of a sermon essential to its purpose since the purpose of a sermon is “to fish for souls” and not to impart knowledge.

Again, sermons do not constitute lessons or lectures but rather helps for the congregation to grow in the love of God in an explicit and immediate way. And so, while knowledge can help toward this end,

⁵⁴ Cicero, *Orator*, 188.

⁵⁵ Laínez, “Avisos,” 409.

knowledge is not an end in itself in a sermon. Laínez thus presents a simple, twofold concern as to the teaching present in a sermon: that preachers draw on a solid foundation in Catholic theology and that they utilize this knowledge in a way that is beneficial to the congregation.

Of course, what preachers say about theology must be true, otherwise it will not lead the congregation to the true God. Laínez makes this point simply by asserting that “if the office of the preacher, as is said, is to fish souls for heaven, it is clear that this will not done with vain doctrine, but with good.”⁵⁶ He follows this simple directive with two scriptural references: to Jesus’s injunction to the apostles after the resurrection to “go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation,” and the exhortation in the letter to Titus to “teach what is consistent with sound doctrine” (Mk 6:15; Ti 2:1).

The point may seem so obvious as to border on the pedantic, and yet it nevertheless establishes a criterion for preaching that we should not ignore: preachers need a good theological, and particularly scriptural, education. Although cast in sixteenth-century terms, Laínez makes precisely this point: “the preacher has to be a very good scholastic theologian and to be very good in all the materials, because if he lacks this, he is in danger of error in the truth” and it is needful that his good doctrine extends to “Sacred Scripture and the holy doctors.”⁵⁷ Here, while Laínez’s categories of “scholastic theology,” “sacred Scripture,” and “the holy doctors” belong to his time, they represent a well-rounded theological education even today. And without such formation, the ignorance of preachers has the potential to cause real harm to congregations by spreading error.

Yet Laínez values more than theological accuracy. Specifically, he insists that the knowledge imparted must avoid any speculation that would distract the congregation from the fundamental end of growing in the love of God.⁵⁸ As such, he sees preaching as not the place for the preacher either to parade his knowledge or to explore

⁵⁶ Laínez, “Avisos,” 389.

⁵⁷ Laínez, “Avisos,” 391.

⁵⁸ Laínez, “Avisos,” 390.

areas of theology that confuse or intrigue him. Here, Laínez offers a clear standard for what preachers should teach, explaining that their doctrine should “not be curious but profitable.”⁵⁹ In other words, the congregation should find their teaching useful in that it should contribute toward the end that the sermon seeks, which is the growth of the congregation in loving relationship with God. As such, preachers should save for lectures and discussions any musings about theological possibilities or doubts and opinions that might distract or trouble the congregation. Context matters for Laínez: preachers should not use sermons as venues to chase after curiosities but rather to help congregations to grow in their knowledge and love of the Lord.

To that end, persuading, which is the second essential element of good preaching, follows as the means for preachers to move their preaching from the realm of the purely intellectual into the affective. As such, the preacher’s task has more immediacy than that of a teacher of theology in that preachers seek to move the hearts of the congregation in the very moment that they preach to them, stirring up the congregation’s love of God and neighbor. And for this, preachers engage in the rhetorical art of persuasion. Yet Laínez sees the persuasion of preachers as fundamentally different from the persuasion of rhetoricians. Here, he contends that while a worldly rhetorician “places all his confidence in the reasons he provides and expends his efforts on the rhetorical order,” the Christian preacher discovers his primary persuasive power when “he trusts in God and begs from him the help to move” the congregation.⁶⁰

Laínez’s point is itself rhetorically subtle. His contention is not that preachers have no need of rhetoric but rather that they are not using their rhetorical skill to make their own points. Instead, they are providing God’s reasons and relying on God’s reasonableness and not constructing a logically ordered argument to achieve their own ends. From this perspective, preachers are not dishonest politicians or cutthroat salespeople, who need to embellish and obfuscate in order to convince an audience

⁵⁹ Laínez, “Avisos,” 390.

⁶⁰ Laínez, “Avisos,” 395.

of a proposition that they themselves may or may not believe. In contrast, preachers, with the firm conviction of the truth of what they preach, preach and indeed ought to preach out of that conviction.

Laínez thus counsels that the preacher's rhetoric should be notable precisely for being unadorned. Relying primarily on the grace

Relying primarily on the grace of God to move the congregation, preachers should speak in a natural tone of voice, with all the enthusiasm and love they really feel.

of God to move the congregation, preachers should speak in a natural tone of voice, with all the enthusiasm and love they really feel. As he puts it, "the principally important thing to bear fruit is that [the preacher] speaks true things and with his own voice."⁶¹ From this perspective, God calls preachers to speak honestly

and from their own experience, with the voice that has been shaped by their own joys, hopes, and struggles. As such, it is not by rhetorical flourishes but by ensuring that "he says what is in his heart" that the preacher will persuade the congregation of the truth of his words.⁶² Thus, Laínez offers the contrast between those who can move their congregations "in their guts" (*en las entrañas*) and those who say "very pretty things" but leave their congregations unmoved.⁶³ And for this reason, preachers must believe what they preach and express those beliefs with straightforward honesty. Indeed, Laínez considers that religious truth, and not rhetorical art, lies behind the reasons for faith that preachers profess as crucial for good preaching.

With this truth, then, the preacher aims to delight the congregation. Yet curiously enough, although Laínez presents it as the third essential element of good preaching, delight seems to strike Laínez as problematic. On this point, he no sooner has brought up the element of delight than he begins to insist that he is not speaking of that which gives "contentment to worldly people."⁶⁴ Here, his concern lies with triviality, for in sermons,

⁶¹ Laínez, "Avisos," 407.

⁶² Laínez, "Avisos," 408.

⁶³ Laínez, "Avisos," 395–96.

⁶⁴ Laínez, "Avisos," 409.

“the preacher is speaking in the person of God of what fulfills the salvation of souls, in things so grave and in a place so holy” that it would be “very disrespectful to use profane things.”⁶⁵ And so, as Laínez considers the seriousness of salvation, sin, and the almost overwhelming difficulties the proclamation of the Gospel faces in every age, he wants to make sure that the readers of his treatise know that he has no desire to encourage preachers to pursue in a self-serving fashion the delight of a congregation. Indeed, Laínez argues that to win the affection and accolades of a congregation without confronting the challenges inherent in the Gospel would mean succumbing to “vain honor from the world.”⁶⁶

And so, if a sermon is to give delight to its congregation, it must do so by offering “things that delight holily.”⁶⁷ Here, Laínez’s fundamental counsel reminds preachers of the truth they seek to proclaim—namely, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is good news that Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose, and we should take great delight in the salvation Christ offers us. Thus, the preacher should always aim to present the Gospel in all its beauty so that the congregation might find “holy delight” in the proclamation of salvation. As such, the preacher should certainly “maintain a beautiful order in his sermons, [and] beautiful figures and comparisons and points given in a pleasing and delightful style.”⁶⁸ From this perspective, the means that the preacher uses to express the message should reflect its beauty. But on a deeper level, preachers also need to attend carefully to “the beauty of the doctrine” they proclaim, since the beauty that will bring holy delight derives from the message itself of the sermon.⁶⁹

Laínez, however, does not leave what he means by the beauty of doctrine on this general level. In specifying how preachers ought to ensure the beauty of their teaching, he explains that beautiful doctrine consists in “one of two things”: either “a delicate point that not everyone knows” or a common point made in “a way that is not common.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Laínez, “Avisos,” 409.

⁶⁶ *SpEx* 142; ed. Ganss, 66.

⁶⁷ Laínez, “Avisos,” 409.

⁶⁸ Laínez, “Avisos,” 409.

⁶⁹ Laínez, “Avisos,” 410.

⁷⁰ Laínez, “Avisos,” 410.

The delicate points of doctrine consist of those parts of Christian teaching unfamiliar to a congregation and which a congregation therefore ignores. In our contemporary context, we might think of the case of Catholic social thought, which remains unknown by many Catholics who think, for example, of morality as the purview of personal sins, ignoring structural sin and the ways that we contribute to it.

Finally, delight plays an essential role in good preaching precisely because delight in Christ's life and love opens people to God's transformative grace.

On the other hand, Laínez's "common points of doctrine" have to do with material that any preacher might want to preach but that might not have much impact

on the congregation because everyone has heard it so often. We might think here of the message that "God loves you." Despite its truth and profundity, unless preachers can find "a way that is not common" to proclaim it, quite possibly no one in the congregation will pay such a statement any heed. As Laínez puts it so eloquently, "many things are old that [preachers] have to preach and say each day," but it is "a new way of saying them, that is less common [that] gives delight."⁷¹ And it is here that "rhetorical colors can be brought in."⁷² On that note, even a simple change from "God loves you" to "God pays profound attention to you, caring for your needs with gentleness and tenderness" can make an old truth new enough to resonate differently.

Finally, delight plays an essential role in good preaching precisely because delight in Christ's life and love opens people to God's transformative grace and makes them willing cooperators with that grace. For the proclamation of the beauty and goodness of God enables a preacher to speak "in the person of God of what fulfills the salvation of souls."⁷³ And in this way, delight works together with persuasion and teaching to enable the preacher to accomplish the end of "fishing for souls," and brings people more deeply into a loving relationship with God. To summarize, by teaching sound and useful doctrine, by speaking persuasively from

⁷¹ Laínez, "Avisos," 411.

⁷² Laínez, "Avisos," 411.

⁷³ Laínez, "Avisos," 409.

one's convictions, and by delighting the congregation with the beauty of the Gospel, preachers reveal the God whom they know: the God who has forgiven and saved them and who bids them feed his sheep.

III. The Counsel of Laínez Today

To grasp the full implications of Laínez's counsel for our preaching today, we must return to the question of context. In the discourse he delivered on justification at the Council of Trent, Laínez proved himself a master of contextualized preaching. Specifically, he recognized that he needed the skills of both preacher and theologian to move the hearts of the motley assembly of theologians, prelates, and nobles that would determine the church's response to the Lutheran theology of justification. However, he did not deliver that discourse in the same style as the sermons that, in 1547, so moved André des Freux in Florence. While he undoubtedly used many of the same techniques, his aim and his audience were distinct, and he would not have gained his reputation as a preacher had he preached at the high level of theological sophistication that his intervention at Trent required. In short, Laínez knew how to meet his listeners where they were—an essential skill for any preacher.

A. The Question of Context

In order to draw fruit from his counsel on preaching, we therefore must begin by addressing context, specifically in terms of venue and audience. First, as noted above, most Catholics experience sermons today as relatively short homilies delivered after the Gospel in the context of a Mass. Thus, Pope Francis writes, in his landmark apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, of how “the homily has special importance due to its eucharistic context: it surpasses all forms of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people which lead up to sacramental communion.”⁷⁴ Indeed, homilies at Mass

⁷⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013f), §137, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*).

serve a liturgical purpose both by helping the congregation to participate in the liturgy and preparing them to receive communion.⁷⁵ This ought to give ministers pause, for example, should they consider using the homily for an extended examination of conscience which, while it could help prepare listeners for the sacrament of reconciliation, might do less to prepare them to receive Holy Communion. Furthermore, by the time of the homily, they generally have already had an opportunity, during the penitential rite, to consider their sinfulness.

In contrast, sermons, at the time of Laínez, while they usually occurred on Sundays and feast days, happened outside of Mass and typically ran two to three hours. In this context, it might make sense to deliver a sermon focusing on repentance, provided that such a sermon helped the congregation to grow in loving relationship with the Lord. Likewise, while giving a long homily during Mass today could risk making the homily seem more important than the Eucharist, the people of Laínez's time expected a long sermon. For this reason a congregation that had come out specifically to hear Laínez preach might have left disappointed had he sent them home after only a few minutes.

Second, Laínez preached to congregations in some ways more and in some ways less diverse than what we might encounter in a North American parish today. Without question, his congregations had much less cultural and linguistic diversity than many—if not most—in the US and Canada. But today we can be much more confident that nearly every adult present at Sunday Mass has made a considerable effort to be there, given that there are too many easy reasons to avoid going to Mass today for us to pretend that the old social pressures that drew perhaps less than wholeheartedly devout Catholics to Mass still have much influence in most Catholic subcultures. However, attending religious events in sixteenth-century Europe belonged to the social, cultural, and even political life of the time. For this reason, Laínez probably found himself preaching to a wider range of attitudes and sensibilities than the average parish priest in the US and Canada today.

⁷⁵ Thus, in the US bishops' document on Sunday homilies, we read that "in the Eucharistic celebration the homily points to the presence of God in people's lives and then leads a congregation into Eucharist, providing, as it were, the motive for celebrating the Eucharist in this time and place" (*Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018], 23.

Given these very different contexts, and considering the social pressures that work against faith today, it might then help contemporary Catholics more to encourage them gently rather than deliver accusatory sermons that seem to presume guilt. In other words, while Laínez may have had good reason to suspect the presence of morally unrepentant people in his congregations, we have less reason to harbor the same suspicions today. As Pope Francis notes, the eucharistic homily “takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people.”⁷⁶ Attentiveness to this context thus seems to call preachers to encourage the faithful in their sincere desires rather to the reproach the unrepentant.

Still, Laínez’s counsel remains relevant in the situations we as preachers find ourselves today. We need only to make sure, when we consider his suggestions, that we apply them to our real context in all its specificity. From this perspective, just as our seven-minute homilies on Sunday mornings differ from Laínez’s two-hour sermons on the afternoons of feast days, so too does a Sunday homily in a culturally-diverse parish differ from a daily Mass during a retreat or a Sunday night Mass on a university campus. And, just as Laínez adapted himself to the dignitaries at Trent, as well as to the least educated in his congregation in Florence, so too must we always take the lived reality of our congregations into account in the preparation of our sermons.

B. Laínez in Dialogue with Pope Francis

With these contextual considerations in mind, we now return to Laínez’s counsel for preachers. Indeed, when placed beside the homiletic vision that Pope Francis presented in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Laínez’s advice for those who preach enables us to make the pope’s portrait of preaching at once more integral and more concrete.⁷⁷

To begin with, Laínez’s counsel expands beyond the specific advice of Pope Francis by integrating preaching into the entire life of the preacher. The Holy Father devotes considerable attention to the preparation for giving a homily, insisting that “preparation for preaching is so important

⁷⁶ EG, §137.

⁷⁷ See EG, §§135–59.

a task that a prolonged time of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity should be devoted to it.”⁷⁸ He then suggests a step-by-step process that involves quiet, study, prayer, and reflection. In contrast, Laínez does not offer such specifics regarding preparation for preaching. However, it seems his lack of detail does not stem from any disregard for the importance of good preparation but from a recognition that the most fundamental preparation for a preacher must come from his overall formation in the Christian and ministerial life.

Herein lies the crux of Laínez’s integral approach to preparation for preaching. As explained above, Laínez places preaching in the context of the special friendship between the preacher and the Lord. For Laínez, to preach well, we must know God well. This means that we must spend significant and consistent time in prayer while also striving to live lives of virtue, for “whoever says, ‘I have come to know him,’ but does not obey his commandments, is a liar” (1 Jn 2:4). It is only when we know the Lord, spend time with the Lord, and strive to live lives consistent with that relationship that we are able, in our preaching, to “feed Christ’s sheep” with the tenderness and love we have come to know through Christ’s care of us. This, for Laínez, constitutes the foundation of good preaching. And while none of it describes a method for homily preparation, we can turn for that to Pope Francis’s good suggestions. But if we do not cultivate our relationship with God through prayer and virtue—if we do not strive to care for our congregations as Christ has cared for us—then no amount of technical preparation for our homilies will bear fruit. Most fundamentally, we must, as Laínez insists, root ourselves in the love of God that we seek to proclaim.

Yet Laínez does offer specific advice. Indeed, as he turns from the purpose and foundation of good preaching to the means to preach well, his counsel both resonates with that of Pope Francis and expands upon the pope’s advice to offer concrete detail. As discussed above, Laínez uses the trio of teach, persuade, and delight derived from St. Augustine—who had derived them from Cicero—to structure his commentary on the best means for preaching well. And while Francis does not utilize the same organization for his

⁷⁸ EG, §145.

catechesis, the two Jesuits present a remarkably united front on the proper use of rhetoric in preaching.

Laínez's contention that the teaching in a sermon must be useful to the congregation resonates with the pope's insistence that "preaching which would be purely moralistic or doctrinaire, or one which turns into a lecture on biblical exegesis, detracts from this heart-to-heart communication which takes place in the homily and possesses a quasi-sacramental character."⁷⁹ Here, Laínez considers persuasion as a function of honesty and sincerity in the proclamation of the preacher's own faith, which Francis echoes when he counsels "the closeness of the preacher, the warmth of his tone of voice, the unpretentiousness of his manner of speaking, the joy of his gestures."⁸⁰ Finally, just as Laínez argues that the proper delight of a sermon should stem not from any crass effort to entertain but from the beauty of the Gospel message, Francis similarly warns that "the homily cannot be a form of entertainment like those presented by the media, yet it does need to give life and meaning to the celebration," since "the Lord truly enjoys talking with his people."⁸¹

But just as Francis offers more specific advice than Laínez on how to go about preparing a homily, Laínez fills out the pope's suggestions by reminding us that teaching in sermons must be sound, certain, and useful. Here, he reminds the reader of the necessity of a solid theological and scriptural education that means for us today that we cannot rely on the theological content that we studied in preparation for ordination. To deliver truly sound doctrine, we must, of course, confirm that what we say accords with church teaching. But to meet the high standard Laínez sets when he says that a preacher should "be a very good scholastic theologian" requires that we continue to study and deepen our understanding of the faith we proclaim.⁸²

Of course, this certainly implies that we question and wonder. Yet Laínez draws for us here an important pastoral line in insisting that

⁷⁹ EG, §142.

⁸⁰ EG, §140.

⁸¹ EG, §§138, 41.

⁸² Laínez, "Avisos," 391.

we not use our preaching to engage in speculation. Rather, we should choose the teaching that we present when preaching for its usefulness toward helping our congregations grow in loving relationship with God. If we opt in our homilies, for example, to speculate about the possibility of how the doctrine of the church could develop in regard to the ordination of women as deacons, we risk alienating some and angering others while quite possibly also triggering the frustration and hurt of those who long for such a development and feel bitterness toward the church on this topic. Given, then, that our preaching should facilitate greater communion with God and God's people, a sermon, particularly one at Mass, seems hardly the place for fomenting such discord.

And so, if we accept, with Laínez, that our preaching ought to set people "on the road to heaven," then we will not think about our sermons primarily in didactic terms.⁸³ Here, we see the use of rhetorical persuasion. However, Laínez does not think that we need to manipulate our congregations but that our technique needs to allow the persuasive power of the Gospel to reach the people to whom we preach. For this reason, we ought to craft sermons that have little rhetorical adornment, deliver them with a natural tone, fill them with heartfelt conviction, and direct them to move congregations on a visceral and not merely an intellectual level. Above all, we should keep in mind that overly elaborate rhetoric can obscure the simplicity of the message, leaving people either more caught up in the majesty of the discourse or suspicious of our intentions. But if we believe what we preach, and this belief informs the way we live our lives, then our preaching should allow the depth of what moves us to move the congregation.

Most fundamentally, the people to whom we preach should know that what we proclaim to them delights us. However, as Laínez makes clear, we should not confuse delight with entertainment. While our homilies may benefit from humor, if we tell jokes only to get laughs or to prove our intelligence, then we miss the point of the exercise. Finally, the true delight at the heart of good preaching is holy delight—the joy we feel at knowing the Good News of Jesus Christ. And Laínez explains that we can communicate this delight to our congregations by causing

⁸³ Laínez, "Avisos," 385.

them to take great pleasure in both the beautiful style of our sermons and the beautiful doctrine we teach. Our attention to making our homilies beautiful through our choice of words, metaphors, and rhetorical devices then helps to welcome people into our preaching. In other words, the attention we pay to the construction of our homilies bears fruit in the attention people pay to what we say.

From this perspective, then, what matters most is what we say. And for Laínez, beautiful teaching in a homily involves either presenting complicated points in a way that the average listener can understand them or explaining common points in a way that makes them fresh for the congregation. Thus, preaching on Scripture at Mass requires us to pay attention to the most confusing or troubling aspects of the passages in the lectionary. And if something confuses or disturbs us, or we suspect that it will confuse others, then we should talk about those points and try to help people see how these things belong to the Good News. Doing so will make the Gospel appear more beautiful for our congregations, especially if it leaves them understanding better something that has long bothered them.

So too, when we are called to preach on the most familiar passages of Scripture, we do well to consider how we can make the familiar newly enlivening. For example, regarding the idea that love of God and neighbor fulfil the law, most people know that we do not love as well as we ought, for which reason it probably will not help much to invite our congregations to examine their consciences. But if we can ask people to consider how this double commandment imbued the life and ministry of Jesus and thus present him not merely as a lawgiver but as the one who desires to help us love better, we might stand a better chance of inspiring the congregation to a new hope in the possibility of their Christian life. The beauty of the Gospel then can motivate us much more strongly to deepen conversion than any lecture we might give on sin and failure.

For Diego Laínez, the ministry of preaching consists in no more and no less than what Christ called Peter and Andrew to do—namely, to fish for souls and, in so doing, to set people on the road to salvation. In short, Jesus is that road—that way to salvation. And when we preach, God calls us to proclaim not the depth of our knowledge

but the One we have come to know deeply: Jesus Christ. And so ultimately, Laínez counsels preachers simply to ground themselves in the love of God, for they cannot preach what they have not experienced. Preachers must therefore be people of prayer who take regular recourse to God, since they learn to love God's people from having experienced God's love themselves.

Preachers thus model for their congregation by the way they love them when they preach what loving God and neighbor looks like. To do this, they utilize sound methods of teaching, persuasion, and delight. Here, they teach at the service of love by staying grounded in the truth of God's love; persuade by sharing the way God has loved the preachers themselves; and delight by inviting their congregations to experience how deeply God loves them. This simple logic lay at the heart of Laínez's renown as a preacher. And today, his approach invites us to renew our own preaching, not by learning a new method or embellishing our homilies but by returning to the fundamentals of why we preach at all. We have known the love of God for us, and that love has taught us to love God's people ever more deeply. If we can allow that truth to radiate throughout our preaching, then we have every reason to hope that we can leave congregations as deeply consoled as did Diego Laínez.

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